

## פרשת אמור

# Parashas Emor

(Leviticus 21:1-24:23)

אָמַר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לֹנֶפֶשׁ לֹא  
יִטְמָא בְּעַמּוּיוֹ

*Speak unto the priests, the children of Aaron, and say unto them that one must not become impure amongst his people (Leviticus 21:1) (Based on Drash V'iyun).*

*Sensitivity  
To a  
Person's  
Feelings*

This commandment prohibits a *Kohen* from coming in contact with a dead body. We might take note that Moses was instructed to convey this commandment only to the *children* of Aaron, even though Aaron was still alive. Why was this *mitzvah* not directed to Aaron as well?

The Midrash states that when the Israelites received the Torah, they achieved freedom from the Angel of Death (*Shemos Rabbah* 41:9). This does not mean that they would have lived eternally, but rather that death would occur without the medium of the Angel of Death, similar to that of Moses and Aaron, who died by the kiss of G-d.

Although a dead body has a status of *tumah* (impurity), this applies only when death occurs via the Angel of Death. Exceptional *tzaddikim* whose soul departed from the body by becoming one with G-d, and whose death was not via the Angel of Death, did not have a status of *tumah* (*Kesubos* 103a *Tosafos*).

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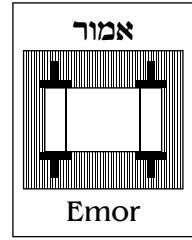
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This freedom from the Angel of Death at Sinai was forfeited by the sin of the Golden Calf, and at this point, the concept of *tumah* recurred.

The Talmud states that if a person has repented having done something wrong, one is not permitted to say, "Remember what you once did" (*Bava Metzia* 58b). In the verse of the Torah cited above, we are taught to what extent we must take caution not to offend a penitent by reminding him of his misdeed.

Aaron was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf, and even though he had good intentions (see *Shemini*, "Refusing Rationalization"), he nevertheless continued to bear guilt, and was hesitant to assume the position of High Priest (*Rashi, Leviticus 9:7*). Since the *mitzvah* for a *Kohen* to abstain from contact with the dead because of *tumah* was a consequence of the sin of the Golden Calf whereby the immunity to the Angel of Death was lost, G-d instructed Moses to relate this *mitzvah* to Aaron's children and not directly to Aaron himself, because to do so might arouse the feelings of shame and guilt, something which he had atoned for with sincere *teshuvah*. From this Divine instruction, we should learn how cautious we must be to avoid offending someone who is particularly sensitive.

The Talmud states, "Occupy yourself with it [Torah], for everything is contained in it" (*Ethics of the Fathers* 5:22). At first glance, the Torah is instructing the *Kohen* to abstain from *tumah*, but the nuance of the verse conveys a major principle of decency, teaching us how far we must go in respecting the sensitivities of others. Even an indirect and remote reference to something which may offend a person is improper. To achieve this level of consideration for others, we must not only watch our words, but we must think before we talk. We must think about the other person and his particular sensitivities, and we must not think only about what we say but how we say it, in order to avoid offending him.



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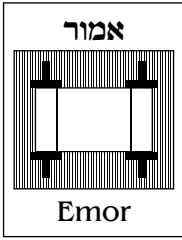
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*The  
Essence  
of a Jew*

וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

*I will be sanctified amidst the Children of Israel (Leviticus 22:32).*

This verse is the basis for requiring a *minyan* (a quorum of ten) in order to recite certain prayers of *kedushah* (declaring the Divine holiness). The Talmud uses one of the thirteen methods of deriving *halachah* from the Scriptures, which is by equating two verses that contain identical words. Thus, the verse cited above reads, "I will be sanctified *amidst* the Children of Israel," and there is a verse that reads, "Separate from *amidst* this community" (*Numbers* 16:21). Just as the latter verse refers to a group of ten, so does the former verse refer to a group of ten (*Berachos* 21b).

The verse in *Numbers* refers to the group of twelve spies that scouted the land of Canaan, of whom only two, Joshua and Caleb, spoke favorably about the land. The remaining ten, who discouraged the Israelites from entering the Promised Land, were responsible for the calamity of the entire generation of the Exodus perishing in the desert. Indeed, the verse reads, "Separate from amidst this community and I will destroy them in a moment." Why is the requirement of a *minyan* derived from a group that the Torah describes as wicked?

Here the Torah tell us that the Jew never loses his *kedushah*, even if he sins. Nine *tzaddikim* do not constitute a *minyan*, but ten sinners do (*Orach Chayim* 55:11). The essence of a Jew is not altered even if he deviates, and the Divine Presence rests where ten Jews congregate, even if they are sinful.

A sin is a blemish, and unsightly blemishes ruin the beauty of a fine garment, but they do not destroy. *Teshuvah* is of course required as a cleansing process to restore the garment to its full beauty. However, the Jew with blemishes is a Jew nevertheless, and his essential sanctity remains intact even if he has sinned.

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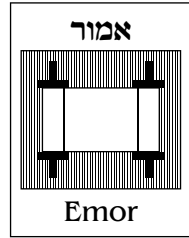
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מוֹעֲדֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֵלֶּה הֵם  
מוֹעֲדֵי

*The festivals of G-d which you shall proclaim  
as convocations of holiness, these are My  
festivals (Leviticus 23:2).*



*The  
Festivals: A  
Calling to  
Holiness*

The phrase מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ, usually rendered “convocations of holiness,” can also be translated as “callings to holiness,” for that is what the festivals are – a calling to holiness. In the prayers of the festival services we say, “You have given us festivals for joy, holidays for gladness.” It is noteworthy that we do not say festivals of joy or holidays of gladness, but for joy and for gladness. In others words, the festivals should provide a carry-over of joy and gladness throughout the entire year.

The *simchah* of the festivals is certainly not primarily that of the gustatory delights that grace the table, but rather the *simchah* of the *mitzvos* of the festivals: the *simchah* of the *kedushah* which the festivals represent and convey, whether it be the liberation on Pesach with its many Divine miracles, the receiving of the Torah on *Shavuot*, the commemoration of the protective clouds of glory on *Succot*, the soul searching and rededication of one’s life on *Rosh Hashanah*, or the cleansing of the soul and the Divine forgiveness on *Yom Kippur*. These concepts should elevate a person to new spiritual heights, and give him a more profound awareness of his existence, and a means whereby he can achieve a closer relationship with G-d. The festivals also intensify the bounds of brotherhood among Jews, as people congregate to join in prayer and celebration, and as they are aroused to give particular attention to the needs of the underprivileged.

When attending Friday night services at the *Kosel HaMaaravi* (Western Wall) together with people from the four corners of the earth, I often encounter people

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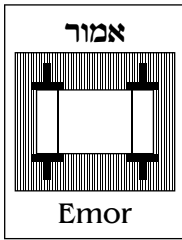
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whom I have not seen for many years. I could only imagine what an experience it must have been in the days of the Sanctuary, when Jews from all of Israel gathered in Jerusalem on each of the festivals. How many embraces among friends there must have been! How many renewals of friendship among people that had been separated by long distances! What joy there must have been in sharing the festive meals with so many friends! The spirit of harmony and brotherhood that prevailed during the festivals certainly elicited a Divine blessing of *kedushah*. The *Baal Shem Tov* said, "Love of one's fellow man is the method to achieve the love of G-d," and the festivals thus enhanced the bond between man and G-d, as well as between man and fellow man.

This *kedushah* should not be limited to the duration of the festival, but should continue to influence a person's lifestyle all year around. Thus, festivals are not only *of* joy, but *for* joy, as they provide the means for true *simchah* by bringing people closer to one another and closer to G-d. The festivals are therefore a calling to holiness, arousing the development of greater spirituality.

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת . . . שִׁבְעַת שַׁבָּתוֹת  
 תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה. עַד מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית  
 תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמֵשִׁים יוֹם

*You shall count for yourselves from the  
 morrow of this festival [Passover] . . . seven  
 complete Shabbosos, until the morrow after  
 the seventh Shabbos-week, you shall count  
 fifty days (Leviticus 23:15-16).*

*Living  
 Each Day*

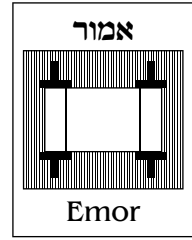
This is the *mitzvah* of the counting of the *Omer*, which we observe beginning with the second day of *Pesach* until the onset of *Shavuos*. We begin by saying, "Today is the first day of the *Omer*," adding

the calculation of the weeks when we arrive at the seventh day, "Today is the seventh day which is one week of the *Omer*," and so on until the fiftieth day. In the prayer that follows the counting of the *Omer*, we pray that by virtue of fulfilling this *mitzvah*, we may rectify the defects that resulted from our failure to fully comply with the *mitzvos* of the Torah.

When we think of the wondrous miracles of the Exodus, we may overlook the greatest miracle of all. The people that had been enslaved and brutally oppressed for so many decades, who had been degraded to a sub-human existence, were within a few weeks able to stand at the foot of Mount Sinai, witnessing the revealed glory of G-d, and proclaiming, "נִצְּשָׁה וְנִשְׁמָעָה, We shall obey and we shall listen," (Exodus 24:7). thus achieving a level of spirituality that was never again reached throughout history. How does such a miraculous transformation take place? What magical means can convert an oppressed slave, whose greatest anticipation was to rest his weary muscles and put some food in his stomach, into a spiritual being whose sanctity surpassed that of the heavenly angels?

The answer to this is the *mitzvah* of counting the *Omer*, whereby one develops spirituality by addressing one's defects *one day at a time*. The Torah teaches us that no challenge is so great that it cannot be successfully overcome if it is only broken down into manageable morsels. In commanding this *mitzvah*, the Torah stipulates that this is a *mitzvah* for all generations (23:14-21), because today no less than for the emancipated slaves of the Exodus, the formula for triumph over the challenges that confront us is to take them one day at a time.

The *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) tries to discourage us from achieving spirituality by magnifying the obstacles we must overcome. "What makes you think you can be a *tzaddik*? Do you really think that you can



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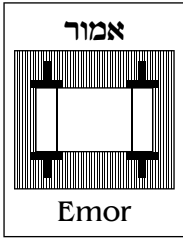
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repudiate all the pleasures of life whose denial are required by spirituality? Is it not foolish for you to undertake a task which is doomed to failure? Why begin something which you know you lack the perseverance to complete?" Our answer to the *yetzer hara* must be, "I am not concerned with the challenge of a lifetime. I have only today to worry about, and for just today I have the capacity to comply with Torah and to abstain from whatever Torah forbids. It is irrelevant whether I possess the strength to continue this for a lifetime, since I am concerned only with today. I will confront the challenges of the future when they arise."

This piecemeal approach not only makes today's challenges manageable, but even provides the means for dealing with greater challenges in the future. How foolish it would be to confront a child just beginning to learn arithmetic with the challenge that he must master differential calculus. This is so far beyond his grasp that he cannot possibly begin to cope with it. Rather he must first master addition, then subtraction, multiplication and division, then fractions and decimals. He will eventually move on to algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and, finally, to calculus. Each level he masters prepares him for the next level, so that eventually he can master the most advanced mathematics. Similarly, in striving for spirituality, each time we achieve one level, we are thereby enabled to attack the next level.

There was no way the newly emancipated slaves could immediately achieve the level of *בְּעֵשָׂה וְנִשְׁמָע*, but as Moses led them through gradual spiritual growth, the achievements of each day became a resource for meeting the challenges of the following day. The answer to the *yetzer hara* is therefore, "I am not undertaking to become a *tzaddik* today, but whatever I do achieve today will give me the capacity to do even more tomorrow. Eventually I will accumulate the means to reach the ultimate goal."

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While the *mitzvah* of counting the *Omer* is restricted to the period between *Pesach* and *Shavuos*, the principle of living one day at a time is not. In the dedication of the Sanctuary, King Solomon prayed that G-d would “do the judgment of His servant and His nation, Israel, providing the needs of each day in its day (*Kings I 8:59*). Living one day at a time is a year-round success formula for confronting the challenges of life and achieving spirituality.

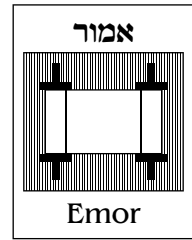
וְעֵנִיתֶם אֶת נַפְשֵׁיכֶם בְּתַשְׁעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב מֵעָרֵב  
 עַד עָרֵב

*You shall starve your vital spirits on the ninth day of the month, from evening unto evening (Leviticus 23:32).*

The Talmud asks, “Since we fast on the tenth day, why does the Torah mention the ninth day?” and answers, “This teaches us that if one eats on the ninth day (to prepare for the fast), it is equivalent to fasting on both the ninth and the tenth days (*Berachos 8b*).

The *Baal Shem Tov* asked that it be revealed to him who would be his companion in Paradise, and he was given the name of someone who lived in a remote village. His curiosity aroused, he traveled to the village to meet this special person, expecting to find a pious scholar, well-versed in both the Talmud and *Kabbalah*. He was most astonished to discover the designated individual to be a boor, who indulged in nothing but working and eating.

“Certainly this man must be one of the hidden *tzaddikim*,” the *Baal Shem Tov* thought, and decided to study his behavior carefully to pierce the disguise of boorishness which he exhibited. But alas! He could see nothing extraordinary about this very simple person, except that he ate voraciously. The *Baal Shem Tov* then decided to confront the man directly. “Tell



*When Eating Is Greater Than Fasting*

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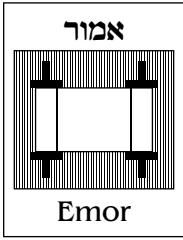
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me the truth about yourself," he demanded. "Who are you, and who were your teachers?" The man responded, "I don't know what you are talking about. I have no teachers, and I have never learned anything beyond reading the *Siddur*. I am a lumberjack, and I cut trees for my living, and that's all I know."

"Then tell me why you eat so voraciously," the *Baal Shem Tov* said. "You have the appetite of a dozen men."

"I will explain that," the man said. "When I was a young boy, my father was a vassal to a feudal lord, who one day insisted that all his vassals must convert to his faith. When my father refused, he was severely beaten. Being a very thin, weak man, he could not put up much resistance, and perhaps would have yielded had he not died from the beating. Right then and there I decided that this would never happen to me. I eat a great deal to make my body strong so that if anyone tries to make me deny my G-d, they will have a formidable opponent to reckon with."

The *Baal Shem Tov* said that he now understood why this man merited so lofty a position in Paradise. Where else in the world could you find a person for whom every morsel of food was a preparation for *kiddush Hashem* (maintaining loyalty to G-d in the face of severe punishment)?

As worthy as the *mitzvah* of fasting on *Yom Kippur* is, the *mitzvah* of eating before *Yom Kippur* can be even greater, being equivalent to a fast of two days, if one eats not for the delight of the palate, but to enable one to properly observe the holy day of *Yom Kippur*.

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